



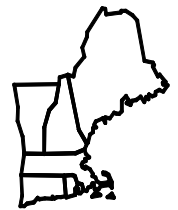
New England Agricultural Statistics Service

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Maine Wild Blueberries

July 25, 2000

A special "THANK YOU" goes to over 300 Maine Wild Blueberry growers and processors who have helped us by completing the wild blueberry survey during July.

ABOVE AVERAGE CROP EXPECTED

Maine's 2000 wild (lowbush) blueberry crop is expected to total 75.0 million pounds, based on grower reported condition of the crop through mid-July. This forecast would place production 14 percent above last year's drought-reduced output, and 19 percent above production two years ago. Most growers surveyed reported that crop prospects were above average this year, with recent shower activity providing adequate moisture to promote good berry size.

The 2000 wild blueberry crop survived the winter with minimal damage from winterkill. Drought conditions for the past two years had caused damage to bushes at some locations, and full recovery for the 2000 crop was not expected. Excessive rain early in the season promoted infection from mummyberry disease, so growers were active applying fungicides and fertilizer. Cool, wet and windy conditions prevailed in early June, just as pollination was getting

underway. Although the cool temperatures slowed honey bee activity, it also extended the bloom period. Below normal temperatures also reduced insect activity and delayed disease progress. Fruit set was generally very good throughout the region, despite poor pollinating conditions. Cool weather persisted into mid-July, and area crop specialists placed crop development at least a week behind normal. Operators reported good berry size and quality as of mid-July in response to frequent rain showers. Disease problems appear to be minimal due to cool temperatures early in the spring. On average, operators expect to begin raking August 2, which falls behind last year's early harvest, but is on schedule with normal.

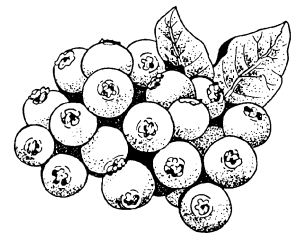
Final payments for the 1999 wild blueberry crop averaged 51 cents per pound, five cents above the price paid in 1998, and eight cents above the price paid for the 1997 crop.

WILD BLUEBERRIES: Production and Value, 1990 - 2000

STATE & YEAR	Total Production ^{1/}	Blueberries for Processing		
		Production	Price per Pound	Value of Production
		1,000 Pounds	Cents	1,000 Dollars
Maine				
1990	75,294	74,951	37	27,732
1991	39,464	39,255	46	18,057
1992	84,513	84,193	41	34,519
1993	64,562	64,212	28	17,979
1994	59,495	59,145	30	17,744
1995	65,944	65,639	32	21,004
1996	59,198	58,930	57	33,590
1997	73,816	73,540	43	31,622
1998	62,981	62,621	46	28,806
1999	65,864	65,803	51	33,560
2000 ^{2/}	75,000	--	--	--

^{1/} Includes fresh and processed production.

^{2/} Current year production is forecast as of mid-July assuming normal conditions for the remainder of the grower season.



BLUEBERRY COMMENTS 2000, AS REPORTED ON THE GROWER SURVEY

Last year's yield was down due to the drought. We have had one problem this year where there was some insect damage. We're not expecting our yield to be greatly reduced overall, however. I think the crop is not going to be as good as it should be because of the weather conditions. Bees couldn't work because it was too wet. My berries look good in some places, but quite small in other places. Some concern about the set because of the cold rainy weather earlier in season. If set is good - should be a good year. Bloom was late so that may have helped. Very little winter damage. Good bloom set. Good moisture so far. Crop looks good. Frost, disease and

insects serious. Weeds and grasses a big problem. Perfect weather, but pollination was only average. Drought hurt. In mid-July, prospects for a good crop are good. Pollination poor due to rain in May. Lost a lot of berries last summer to drought. Acreage looks good at present. Bees worked despite rain. Prices for blueberries are up this year. Costs are 35 cents a pound to produce. Prices paid for berries have increased from 32 cents four years ago to 50 cents last year. Last year was poor due to drought. This year had a brief spell of pollination - ripening of crop will not be staggered. Whole crop will be ripe in a 10-day span or less. Two percent of

BLUEBERRY COMMENTS 2000 (CONT'D)

crop winter-damaged. Excellent bloom and good set this year. Irrigating this year, so moisture won't be a problem. No insect or disease problems yet. We have mummyberry. Berries of average size. No rain to speak of. No snow cover during winter. Didn't import bees and local pollination didn't do the job. Very poor uneven set. Little or no winter damage. Better than average bloom. Some blight. Adequate moisture. A better than average crop expected. With significant rain, should see another good crop. Slight amount of disease - needed two sprayings. Lots of moisture during bloom, but pollination above average. Looks good. Expect a below average crop this year - disease. Burned late and drought in '98 and '99. Excellent flowering. Very good berry set (lots of bees!). First blue, 3rd of July. No visible winter damage. Good bloom. Wet weather resulted in an average set. No visible disease or major insect problems. Prospects for a fair crop. Fields grown with bushes. Blossom ok - berry set looks skimpy and smaller than usual. Processors haven't been real fair about prices - we'll see what this year brings. Good average crop - berries seem to be good quality. Adequate rainfall to date. Still have bunch berry problem. New type of weeds coming into fields. Ample moisture in July should result in a very good crop. 1999 drought hurt fruit buds for 2000. Turkeys are becoming quite a problem. I would look for average crop about the same as last year if we don't get into drought conditions. Insects worse than average this year (flea beetle, strawberry root weevil). Our crop is expected to be a little below average for us. Labor will be a problem - the USDA and DOL are no help. In fact, INS intimidation tactics make it difficult to get any harvest help. Light frost in mid-June and freeze late March when buds began to open - good bloom. Good set overall except in spots. No disease and minimal insect problems. Some spots in berry set - overgrown by leaves. Inclined to be growing large so far. I had a little winter damage. Good blossom set. The berries are a good size now and we have been getting a few showers to keep them going. We have a small mummyberry problem, but right now, looks like a good crop. This year's crop will be poor because last year's burned area dried out and the bushes never recovered from the drought. Some

damage due to browsing deer and no snow cover. July and August here have been dry the last several years - the showers seem to miss us. This year's crop looks better than the past four years. More moisture is a big factor on my dry sandy soil. Seagulls have been a big problem the last six years and it is getting worse every year. Berry set excellent, moisture ok (as of July 3), may try to irrigate. Blight was minimal. Market appears to be good and in the 50 cent/lb range - which is ok. Expect a good crop if harvesting goes well - labor? We had a good bloom, good pollination (we have our own bees), and just need sunny weather now! We will be irrigating again this year and have drilled a well and dug a pond to enhance our irrigation capabilities. Last year's drought caused plant damage, bloom came in stages, berry size is small at this time. With moisture, berries should increase in size. Not much activity on fly traps. General prospects: if we can get a crew for harvest and it doesn't hail or snow, we'll see everyone in September. Turkeys and other wildlife have ruined a significant amount of berries. More mummyberry this year, bud counts way down, and Canadian corn grass is a problem. Blueberry fields have weed problems including St John's wort, milkweed, wild rose bushes, and grasses. Right to farm law may need modification to further help the blueberry farmer. Everything looked good (no bugs, no spray, good moisture, winter cover, good weed control) until pollination. Put bees out and it rained 10 days. Ended with poor pollination. There were more blossoms this year than I have ever seen! This should be a bumper crop year if current conditions continue through the summer. The thrip had rolled a lot of the leaves on the new burn and now they are unrolling since the application of Diazinon. Weeds that are resistant to Velpar appear to be the biggest problem. Thick grasshoppers, but no other insect problems. Best pollination weather we've ever had. Some blight, as always. Predicting a blueberry harvest is utterly ridiculous - why do you ask every year? I've raked half a field and my prediction based on that raking was still 50 percent under production for that field. Crop looks real good down east. Mummyberry was prevalent in unsprayed fields. Where are the pickers?

The wild blueberry estimating program is funded through a cooperative agreement with the Maine Department of Agriculture as a service to growers and others in the industry. The Maine Wild blueberry report is published and available on the Internet in July. The next Wild Blueberry report will be published and available on the Internet in late 2000 or early 2001. It will contain the final production statistics for the 2000 crop as collected by the Maine Department of Agriculture.

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